

Truth-values and other ideas

Truth-value

Truth-values were chosen for the task that evening because of certain distinguishing features that I really don't feel like going into. But as we all now know, truth-values grind down gears until actual laser-sharp splints fly out amongst the fire-hot sparks and that's a perfect recipe for someone to get hurt. *Physically* hurt. It was something to do with how changeable they were, like cornflour when you mix it with water and squeeze it between your fingers and it turns to clay. One group suggested that it might make the whole thing gentler but they were forgetting about the whole clay-element of the thing. That debate alone went on for a good hour before the same decision that we started with was handed to the tech guy at the back: *truth* and *values* and more specifically *truth-values*. It flashed up on the screen and half the room cheered. Time passed and six became seven became eight became nine and eventually it became inevitable that someone would have to at least try to summarize the main thrust, just some kind of abstract flash in the pan that we could fit twice on an A4 sheet and guillotine for the rest. Would someone write a précis or something like that? 'Cause you know not everybody could make it tonight, not everybody actually has that kind of time: a woman by the exit said she had to bring her girl - the little girl didn't seem to mind at all, but the sight of her was concerning nonetheless. Or at least, surely someone had to make a distinction between what was mind-dependent and what was mind-independent, to explain it to the whole bunch. Look at them! Empty eyes! Even emptier - less alive - when another grey professor told the hall he was the only one from the department of neuroscience here tonight and would someone please give him one good piece of news to take away - and not the fake kind - he wants a real good nugget that won't make neither the experts nor the idiots mad. He stopped himself a moment too late and paused, what he really meant was: how are we going to work together on this?

Valerie

Two little girls laughed so hard they couldn't breathe, tangled on the floor, in a dusty blanket. And on the TV a vivid ident: One hundred women in red dresses dancing for BBC2's main festive event. *Stay with us for fireworks and Auld Lang Syne a little later, but first Valerie Smith takes us on a journey back in time...* It's New Year's Eve, 1999. In matching violet vests the sisters convulse, pulse, uncontrolled, and flushed. Hugging and then palm to cheek, wrestling. Smiling, then pushing away rough and wide-eyed throwing mouths open and taking turns to sit up, spit, and say a woman's name. They haven't heard that one before - too fussy, girlie, and obscure: 'Valerie'. Delicious, *va-le-rie*. It now sounds odd to me. The little one yells the vowels: a into ey into ah into ee into the most offensive noise, an obscenity. And, crying *No!*, the other pulls her to the ground, trying but unable to make another sound. *VALERIE!* she wails again, and cackling laughter grips them like a fever, two little bodies wriggling around because

there's nothing else to say, no other words just the endless possibility of *Valerie*, too funny it hurts. Throwing her legs into the air, the older girl starts to kick, cycling, throwing her feet towards the sky, the blanket flung across her thigh, she hoists her hips into the palms of her hands and kicks upwards, giggling, chuckling, gasping for breath, turning everything on its head. And the little one, thrilled, loves it when her favorite friend plays, which happens less and less these days, and in her excitement says it one too many times - *Valerie, Valerie, Valerie, Valerie, Valerie, Valerie* - chanting, locks her sister's gaze and suddenly it's all a haze. What is all this? And what's the joke? *Valerie*? One second to the next and I couldn't bear the lull, or your cooing like a manic gull. I stilled myself and looked aside, chin up, shoulders back, and one last time: *Let's see out 1999!* I screamed it perfectly, and you looked up at me, lovingly. Countdowns, fireworks, and song. Do you remember when, for a few minutes, really not very long, just the word *Valerie* was everything.

Tan

You once asked me whether a tan is one large freckle. You didn't mean it but you turned to me and said is a tan just one large freckle? and I wasn't in the mood so I said definitely. That was when we were sitting by the green pool and were only brave enough to put our feet in. *High chlorine levels will strip your skin.* I thought that sounded rather good and then I imagined your lovely yellow hair gone alien-green and changed my mind. The next day was the first time that I called you a moose because of the way that I found you staring at the tiles, still, mournful. It was affectionate. And actually you were more like a cow - cows are beautiful - I longed for you to tug the weeds out from under my sun bed and chew on them with your back teeth, chomping your jaw from side to side and flicking your tale at the flies, but instead you just kept asking me stupid questions and picking the dirt from under your fingernails. The last thing I'll say is that you had a golden tan that made me envious. I was envious until you made a joke about sizzling under UV rays which reminded me of an asymmetrical mole I once saw. I didn't let on, though, I just told you that the most powerful people have tans and you seemed pleased.